

CRATER LAKE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEX
Munson Valley, Rim Drive off State Hwy. 62
Crater Lake National Park
Crater Lake
Klamath County
Oregon

HABS No. OR-144¹⁴²

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18-CRALA
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
CRATER LAKE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEX

HABS No. OR-144

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162

Location: Munson Valley, Crater Lake National Park, Klamath County, Oregon.

U.S.G.S. Crater Lake National Park and Vicinity,
Oregon Quadrangle (15'), Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates:

OR-144-A 10/570820/4749640

OR-144-B 10/570750/4749600

OR-144-C 10/570650/4745600

Present Owner: U. S. Department of Interior, National Park Service

Present Occupant: National Park Service Staff

Present Use: Park Administrative Offices, Visitor center, storage

Significance: Crater Lake National Park was established on May 22, 1902, making it the seventh National Park in the United States. For the first few years after the park's establishment, park headquarters were located about five miles south of the lake. By 1924 the park's headquarters had moved to Munson Valley, its current location. Between 1928 and 1930 structures were added to the site, all having the characteristics of the rustic style of architecture developed by the NPS San Francisco Branch of Plans and Design: Steeply-pitched roofs; varied siding materials; use of heavy timbers; earth tones; and siting that is sensitive to the environment. In 1932 five additional buildings were added to the area, all exhibiting massive stone boulders in the exterior walls, steel casement windows, and other typical materials and forms of the fully developed rustic style. A general plan for the headquarters area was drawn up in 1933 by Merel Sager, an NPS landscape architect who worked mainly in western parks and whose responsibilities ranged from design and construction to planning and supervising. His primary duty was to solve visual design problems by determining the physical development of a park and designing the necessary buildings and landscape. At Munson Valley, Sager fully articulated the rustic theme in the buildings there by using massive native rock as an integral part of the architectural vocabulary. A historic district is proposed for the designed complex of buildings and landscape features at Munson Valley. This district exemplifies the rustic style of park architecture in its use of native materials, colors, and forms that harmonize with the environment.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Crater Lake National Park was established on May 22, 1902, the seventh National Park in the United States. The main feature of the park is the clear blue lake that fills the caldera formed from the eruption of Mt. Mazama, an ancient volcano that exploded over 6000 years ago. Its 1,925 foot depth makes it the deepest lake in the United States. The lake is surrounded by rolling mountains, volcanic peaks and evergreen forests. Large ponderosa pine forests with thick understories of manzanita and ceanothus, fragile west meadowlands, open subalpine meadows, cinder cones and volcanic peaks, and glaciated valleys dense with lodgepole pine reflect the varied terrain and vegetation found in the park.

The Crater Lake Administrative Complex is located in the park at headquarters in Munson Valley. Munson Valley and its associated structures have been proposed as an historic district, approximately three miles from the rim of the caldera. The complex is situated in a formerly heavily forested area bisected by Munson Creek. Steep slopes to the north of the complex rise 500 feet to the rim of the caldera.

The complex includes the largest collection of rustic structures within Crater Lake National Park. A circular drive and plaza and two prominent buildings--the Administration Building and the Ranger Dormitory--are the focal point of the district. Roads continue to the northwest and southwest linking additional rustic style utility and residential structures together. There are eighteen structures in all which contribute to the architectural and historical significance of the historic district. The structures derive their historical significance from their association with public efforts to develop, manage, and protect the park's natural and recreational resources. They are significant architecturally as examples of the NPS rustic style, a style used in many older national parks. This documentation focuses on three of those structures: the Administration Building; the Ranger Dormitory, and the Mess Hall.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The first few years after the national park was established, park headquarters were located near the intersection of the Medford and Klamath Falls wagon road, about five miles south of Crater Lake. In 1905 construction of an office and residence for the park's superintendent was begun at Camp Arant, the area known today as Annie Spring. By 1913, several other structures had been built, including a shop and tool house, a barn, and two cottages for seasonal use by the park ranger and other employees.

In 1913 William Gladstone Steel became the new superintendent of the park. He served in this position until 1917. During his tenure, a fair amount of development work was undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The War Department sent the Corps to Crater Lake in 1913 and 1914 to survey the park and build roads. They were stationed at "Government Camp," now park headquarters, and built several log buildings, none of which remain today. The Corps worked in the park until 1919; it was the last national park in which they were involved.

Between the years 1918 and 1927 the supervision and implementation of park planning and development fell under the direction of NPS landscape engineers who were responsible for designing new park structures, developing park plans, supervising concessioner facility design and construction, and coordinating road and trail landscaping projects with the NPS' civil engineering department. Due to funding limitations, a small staff, and a tremendous backlog of projects in parks across the country, few projects were implemented at Crater Lake. Only one building was built at Munson Valley during this period--the Warehouse (1926).

During this decade the NPS rustic style of architecture was developed, with the underlying design philosophy that structures should be in harmony with the natural environment. As noted in Albert H. Good's 1938 Park and Recreation Structures, the rustic style, when successfully handled:

is a style which, through the use of native materials in proper scale, and through the avoidance of rigid, straight lines, and over-sophistication, gives the feeling of having been executed by pioneer craftsmen with limited hand tools. It thus achieves sympathy with natural surroundings and with the past. [1]

Verticality was avoided when possible; a horizontal emphasis made a building sit better on the land, and be a part of the landscape instead of an intrusion upon it. Naturally occurring colors served as a guide for painting buildings. Any natural vegetation would provide screening, so necessary if a structure was to blend with, and be subordinated to, the surrounding landscape. [2]

The practitioners of the rustic style were found in the NPS' Landscape Division, later renamed the Branch of Plans and Designs. Daniel Hull, a landscape engineer and Chief of the division, hired landscape architect Thomas Vint in 1922. Within a year he was promoted to serve as Hull's Chief assistant, and by 1926 he was in charge of the program's daily operation. Under Vint, as funds became available for construction, the architectural ethic of the rustic style blossomed throughout the National Park System. In 1927 Vint was appointed Chief Landscape Engineer. His

appointment coincided with increased funding for the national parks under the Hoover Administration. Vint hired additional architects and landscape architects, assembling a team of creative people who studied and experimented with natural materials such as stone and logs in order to attain the desired effect of structures that harmonize with the environment. By observing the natural landscape and its colors, scale, massing and texture, the designers had a framework from which to base their building designs. [3]

Merel Sager was a Harvard trained landscape architect hired by Vint. Sager worked mainly in the west coast parks and was ultimately assigned responsibility for design activities in Sequoia, General Grant, Lassen Volcanic and Crater Lake National Parks. In the early 1930s, with construction and design activity increasing, other landscape architects, draftsmen and architects were added to the staff. Sager's responsibilities became focused on three parks--Crater Lake, Lassen Volcanic, and Hawaii Volcanoes.

Between 1929 and 1933 the "very best" buildings were built in the national parks. During these years many rustic style structures and sensitive landscapes were built in western parks under the direction of this small corps of designers who together developed a design philosophy of nonintrusive architecture. In the western mountain parks, buildings were constructed of native, natural materials using local colors, shapes and textures; building forms were designed to suit local conditions and environments; building sites were selected to blend with the natural landscape. The structures designed and built at Crater Lake during this period represent the best of the large developments in the parks. It was the first time a single unique vocabulary was used to tie the buildings together visually and to the natural landscape. Merel Sager orchestrated the building and landscape designs implemented during this peak period of development.

The Mess Hall was built during this time. It is the second oldest stone structure at Munson Valley. Designed by the NPS Landscape Division in San Francisco, it was originally built as a bunkhouse, mess hall, and kitchen. It pre-dates Sager's experiments with massive boulders and thus represents an early NPS rustic vocabulary developing at the park. The Mess Hall was constructed by park personnel under the supervision of John Wosky and possibly Merel Sager. Stone for the masonry was obtained from a nearby quarry close to the "Government Camp" site. In 1934 an addition doubled the size of the original structure. This work was a PWA project carried out by day labor under the supervision of Francis Lange and PWA appointee E. Etherton. In 1937, a CCC crew converted unused space on the first floor to women's quarters. [4]

Sager's responsibilities at Crater Lake were broad, ranging from design and construction supervision of trails and roads to planning and supervising rim landscaping. The primary responsibility of field men like Sager was to solve the visual design problems within the parks by determining the physical development of the parks and designing the buildings and landscapes. Sager would spend summers in the parks assessing their needs and directing construction, and winters in NPS "headquarters" in San Francisco drafting plans and preparing reports of the previous season's work.

One of Sager's major contributions to Crater Lake was the modification of the park's 1927 general development plan. In 1930 he designed the Sinnott Memorial, an overlook structure considered to be the first Crater Lake structure to incorporate massive native rock as an integral part of the building's architectural vocabulary. Sager continued to use this theme in subsequent structures built along the rim of the caldera and at Munson Valley. This use of massive boulders and stones in building walls make the collection of Crater Lake structures designed and built during this peak period unique within the National Park System. Only isolated structures within the NPS prior to this time used such large masonry elements, and possibly may have served as models for Sager, but none sparked a consistent vocabulary for a larger group of buildings within the same park.

To accommodate the use of these massive stones--some of them more than 15 cubic feet in volume--in the Crater Lake buildings, Sager devised a construction method that would allow building enclosure within the Cascade's short summer season. Wood formwork was built on concrete and stone foundations to define the interior walls. The forms supported the wood framing members of the second floor gable roof, and while this was being constructed, exterior masonry wall work could proceed at its more laborious pace. The stone walls were built several inches away from the forms and when completed, concrete was poured between the stones and the interior forms. After the concrete cured the forms were removed, leaving a smooth interior surface with wood furring strips embedded within it. The second floor loads were transferred to the stone walls after the forms were removed.

In addition to the use of massive stonework, Sager formalized the integration of other specific building materials into the structures built during this peak development period. Multi-paned steel casement and hinged windows; brown-stained board and batten siding in gable ends (to contrast with the massive stone "base" that anchored the buildings to the earth); and green-stained, split shake roofs, usually steeply pitched to shed the yearly Cascade snow loads, were all standard Sager features. Large exposed timber purlins in the gable ends and exposed rafters at the eaves completed the rustic look. The rustic idiom was fully developed by

1932, when Sager added five buildings to the growing Munson Valley complex. The Ranger Dormitory was begun at this time under Sager's supervision. Problems with the original construction led to major rehabilitation of the building in 1935: a rear chimney was rebuilt; the roof was strengthened; siding was replaced; a flagstone porch with log railings and end porches was built; and the heating system was repaired. Francis G. Lange supervised the 1935 work, with PWA funding. Sager noted in this 1932 report to the Chief Landscape Architect:

The Park Service can be proud of this building. It blends pleasingly with its surroundings....The native stones used in the walls are of goodly size, giving the building a rugged and substantial appearance. The steel sash adapt themselves pleasantly to this style as well as adding to the effect of substantiality. [5]

Two years later, in 1934, the Administration Building was begun. It originally served as offices for park staff. The use of massive boulders to form the exterior masonry walls followed the pattern established earlier at Munson Valley. Armin Doerner, an associate landscape architect for NPS, Francis Lange, and PWA appointee E. Etherton, supervised the work which was completed by day labor drawn primarily from nearby communities. By June of 1936 the building was completed and in use. [6]

While work was underway on buildings begun in 1932, Sager directed landscape work in Munson Valley beginning in 1933. Workers from the Civilian Conservation Corps graded, prepared soil, and planted areas around the Ranger's Dormitory, the Mess Hall and four other buildings. Top soil and peat had to be hauled to the sites prior to planting shrubs due to the poor quality of the soil at Munson Valley. Landscaping of the area proceeded in the following years under the direction of Doerner and Lange, but following Sager's plans. Some of these efforts included the macadamizing, grading, and landscaping of the circular drive in front of the Administration Building and Ranger Dormitory.

Sager's direct supervision of Crater Lake construction ceased after 1933. Doerner and Lange continued overseeing development work at the park.

The three buildings that comprise the Crater Lake Administrative Complex--the Administration Building, the Ranger Dormitory, and the Mess Hall--reflect the various development stages of the NPS rustic style. Built of native stone and natural materials, they incorporate in their designs the nation's romanticized vision of nature and its love for the western frontier. The buildings were sited to blend with their surroundings and yet complement each other, creating a cohesive collection that is consistent in materials, scale, proportion and workmanship. They represent the nature of park planning and construction within the rustic idiom between the late 1920s-1934.

PART II. DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The Crater Lake Administrative Complex--comprised of the Administration Building, the Ranger Dormitory, and the Mess Hall--is part of the largest collection of rustic structures found in the park. The three structures are in their original locations: the Administration Building and Ranger Dormitory are sited perpendicular to each other at the north and west sides of a circular drive and plaza designed and built between 1934 and 1936; the Mess Hall is sited to the southwest, linked to the others by a winding service road. Even prior to their rehabilitation the structures retained a high degree of integrity, despite the varying degrees of disintegration due to a lack of maintenance and severe winter weather. (See architectural data forms for specific building descriptions)

Extensive architectural and engineering studies of these buildings were completed in 1984-85 by the architectural firm of Zaik/Miller/DiBenedetto of Portland, Oregon. Rehabilitation recommendations were developed for each structure focusing on retaining and restoring the significant exteriors of the buildings while continuing the pattern of interior modifications which occurred over the years. These interior alterations served to modernize and winterize the structures which were originally designed for summer use only.

The Administration Building was rehabilitated 1986-87 in accordance with plans prepared in accordance with NPS standards and reviewed and approved by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. The rehabilitation restored the exterior of the structure, including replacement of the roof, repointing of the masonry base as required, restoration of the original steel sash and doors (including new glazing and construction of interior storm windows), removal of the 1958 "A-frame" entrance portico, construction of a masonry snow tunnel on the east elevation of the building, and repainting according to the original color scheme. The interior of the structure was partially reconfigured to meet contemporary office requirements and building codes. Office spaces were redesigned to maximize efficient utilization of the available space, while retaining a sense of the original layout. The main public lobby space on the first floor, with its native stone fireplace and ornamented ceiling rafters and paneling, was restored and original interior detailing, such as hardware, lighting fixtures and stairrails, were retained. New wall surfaces and flooring are simply finished (white wallboard, carpeting, clear stained oak moldings) in a manner compatible with the original finishes. On completion of the rehabilitation of the Administration Building, it was renamed the Merel S. Sager Building. The rehabilitation of this structure, particularly the exterior restoration, enhanced the original design. The Administration Building continues to be a major feature of the headquarters area. [7]

The 1985-86 rehabilitation of the Ranger Dorm has brought this structure from a state of advanced deterioration to its current status as one of the architectural showpieces of the park. The original interior configuration, in which the two wings of the structure were completely separated to permit housing of both sexes in the same building, was opened up and redesigned to accommodate a visitor contact center and offices and research space for the park's interpretive staff. The main floor now incorporates a public interpretive space in the lobby, a small auditorium, restrooms and offices. Original detailing, including the massive native stone fireplaces, wood floors and exposed ceiling beams, wrought iron hardware and light fixtures, were retained and refurbished and supplemented as needed by reproductions or compatible contemporary fixtures. The exterior restoration included a new shake roof, rebuilding of the dormers, rehabilitation of the front patio (which had been partially obliterated by the large culvert previously used for a snow entrance), rehabilitation of the north entrance porch and steel sash and doors, and an addition to the south elevation of a masonry (oversized boulders) snow tunnel. The entrances to this tunnel and that of the Administration Building face each other across the drive, facilitating snow removal and access to the buildings during the winter months. On completion of the rehabilitation, the structure was dedicated as the William Steel Center. The rehabilitation plans were prepared and implemented in accordance with NPS Standards for historic structures and developed in consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. [8]

The Mess Hall was the most deteriorated of the three structures that have been rehabilitated since 1985. The interior was largely unusable as years of deferred maintenance and incompatible alterations had taken its toll on the structure and imminent collapse seemed possible. The exterior rehabilitation included a new shake roof, repainting according to the original color scheme, repointing as required of the masonry base, addition of a snow entrance to the front elevation, and replacement in-kind of the wood sash and doors. The interior was largely gutted and rebuilt, with new wall, floor and ceiling surfaces (wall board, lightly stained trim, carpet) and a new spatial layout (offices and laboratories for the Resource Management and Ranger Divisions). The rehabilitation was carried out in accordance with NPS standards for rehabilitation and plans were reviewed and approved by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. The structure was renamed the Canfield Building. [9]

PART III. ENDNOTES AND SOURCES

Endnotes

1. Good, Albert H. Park and Recreation Structures: Part I--Administration and Basic Service Facilities. United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, Wash. D.C., 1938: p.5.
2. Ibid., p. 6
3. Harrison, Laura Soulliere. Architecture in the Parks: National Historic Landmark Theme Study. National Park Service, Wash. D.C.: p. 4-6.
4. Zaik/Miller/DiBenedetto. Pacific Northwest Region Historic Building Inventory form for the Mess Hall, Crater Lake National Park, Oregon, 1984.
5. Sager, Merel S. "Report to the Chief Landscape Architect through the Superintendent of Crater Lake National Park--A summary of construction during the season of 1932," October 29, 1932. Photocopy of original, p. 23.
6. Zaik/Miller/DiBenedetto. Pacific Northwest Region Historic Building Inventory form for the Administration Building, Crater Lake National Park, Oregon, 1984.
7. Toothman, Stephanie. Revision of Historic Building Inventory form for the Administration Building, Crater Lake National Park, Oregon 1988.
8. Toothman, Stephanie. Revision of Historic Building Inventory form for the Ranger Dormitory, Crater Lake National Park, Oregon, 1988.
9. Toothman, Stephanie. Revision of Historic Building Inventory form for the Mess Hall, Crater Lake National Park, Oregon, 1988.

Sources

1. Crater Lake National Park Landscape Architects' Field Reports, 1929-38. Photocopied from originals at Federal Archives and Records Center, San Bruno, California.
2. Erigero, Pat. Draft National Register Nomination for the Historic Resources of Crater Lake National Park, 1984. Edited and revised by Stephanie Toothman, National Park Service, Seattle, 1988.

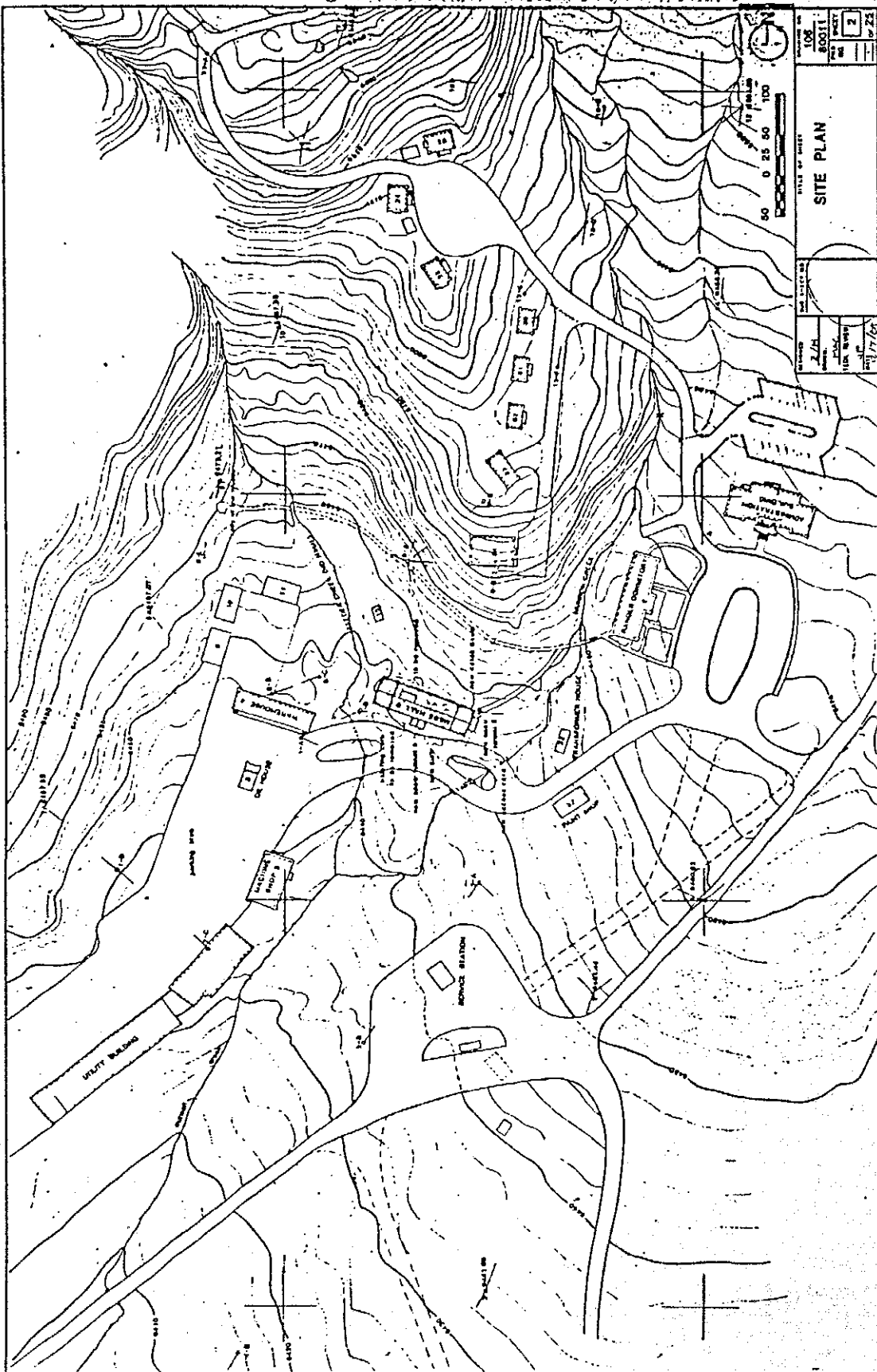
3. Good, Albert H. Park and Recreation Structures: Part I--Administration and Basic Service Facilities. United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, Washington D.C., 1938.
4. Harrison, Laura Soulliere. Architecture in the Parks--National Historic Landmark Theme Study. United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, Wash. D.C., 1986.
5. Miller, James and A. P. DiBenedetto. Historic Building Inventory forms for Munson Valley, Crater Lake National Park, 1984. Revised by Stephanie Toothman, National Park Service, Seattle, 1988.
6. Reynolds, Alan C. List of Classified Structures forms for Crater Lake National Park. Denver Service Center, National Park Service, March 1976.
7. Zaik/Miller/DiBenedetto. Final Reports: Renovation of Mess Hall, Bldg. 3, Crater Lake National Park. Zaik/Miller/DiBenedetto, Portland, Oregon, Dec., 7, 1984.

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National Park Service
Date: October, 1988

CRATER LAKE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER

C.L. Ad. Comp

HABS No. OR-144 (page 11)



SHEET NO. 2	
PROJECT NO. 100	
DATE 11/7/60	
DRAWN BY J. H. HARRIS	
CHECKED BY J. H. HARRIS	
APPROVED BY J. H. HARRIS	
SCALE OF MAP 1" = 100'	
SITE PLAN	

CRATER LAKE